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Special Reports

Sunday, September 25, 2005

Not ready for college

Three-quarters of Michigan's high school graduates are not likely to be ready for college-level work.

Subject	Score*	Percentage meeting score or better
English composition	18	70%
Algebra	22	45
Social sciences	21	55
Biology	24	32
Students meeting	and the first too you don't see up. In	25
all benchmark scores		*Coñege-ready score out of 36 points
Source: ACT		The Detroit News

Adopt tougher curriculum to improve Michigan schools

Jobs and state's economic future are on the line

The Detroit News

A tough statewide public education curriculum is needed to give Michigan a chance at erasing its education deficit. Curriculum development by the state's 500 local school districts ranges from disastrous to disappointing.

The current system of education benchmarks is not working. Thousands of students are sleep-walking through classes and landing unprepared at colleges and universities.

At Henry Ford Community College, for example, about 82 percent of the school's new students take remedial math.

Students don't meet current benchmarks

Technically, the state has benchmarks for students to meet. But not everybody's paying attention to them. In the class of 2005, about 33 percent met or exceeded the

Proposed education fixes

A panel chaired by Lt. Gov. John Cherry suggested changes including:

- · Create a curriculum that actually reflects skills required to succeed after high school.
- · Remake high schools to motivate students.
- Create compacts that plug business and entrepreneurship into education.
- Teach all students to meet college entrance requirements.

CyberSurvey Are schools too weak?

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state standards for social studies.

A hallmark of Michigan education is local control of schools. But the state Constitution gives overall supervision to the State Board of Education.

The two concepts are not mutually exclusive. The state already has education benchmarks and can revisit them without micromanaging classrooms and getting involved in daily lesson plans. Setting a higher bar and modernizing curriculum would give Michigan students a better start after graduating from high school.

Over the years, a lot of questionable tradition has built up. Many schools teach biology, chemistry and physics in that order. But a researcher reports that the order was originally determined by listing the subjects alphabetically at the turn of the last century. Similarly, biology and chemistry are often taught as separate classes when it might make more sense to teach them together as biochemistry.

Tougher standards prepare better workers

Gov. Jennifer Granholm recently said a rigorous mandatory curriculum for Michigan high schools is critical to the state's economic future. That is, the state's jobless rate is high partly because Michigan is not producing educated workers. Michigan lacks the culture of education required to keep the state competitive, a study commission said last year.

Fixes fall to the State Board of Education, which has a long history of being out to lunch. But the board, spurred by Granholm, is expected to announce curriculum recommendations this fall.

Those standards should be tough, and parents, teachers and students alike should understand that more work will be required of them.

Change can not come incrementally. Michigan must move swiftly to make sure its students are learning what they need to know to compete in a global economy.

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Some lawmakers call for a rigorous mandatory curriculum for Michigan high schools. Parents, would you support a tougher state curriculum even if it means children will have to spend more hours on homework?

No

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